

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund

Asian Elephants are best known in the United States as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, domesticated elephants primarily are beasts of burden. And, in some nations elephants hold important religious significance. An estimated 16,000 Asian elephants have been domesticated and used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Ironically, it is the destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture, and the encroachment of human civilization that poses the greatest threat to the survival of Asian elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannahs of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants still exist in the wild—about half of which are found in India. Mature bulls can weigh as much as 11,000 pounds. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every

day. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles. Elephants require a lot of natural resources and as human populations expand, conflict with elephant populations grows.

When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassava, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are poisoned or shot each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants, in connection with elephant crop raids.

Poaching, which is the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones, also poses a serious threat. Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants have left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tusker.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as “mukhnas.”

In 1997, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act, which established a fund for protection of the Asian Elephant and the conservation of its habitat.

International Affairs
Division of International Conservation
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 730
Arlington, VA 22203
703/358-1754
703/358-2849 fax
internationalconservation@fws.gov
<http://international.fws.gov>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
www.fws.gov

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Asian elephant

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Highlights of the 21 projects funded from the 2003 appropriation of \$1.2 million are:

- Assisting the Cambodian Ministry of the Environment with anti-poaching training and law enforcement activities in the Cardamom Mountains, which encompass the largest contiguous habitat for elephants and other endangered species in Cambodia;
- Financial support for anti-poaching units at India’s Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary where one of the world’s largest single population of Asian elephants are found;
- Mobilizing a crop-raid prevention team to manage human-elephant conflict around a new wildlife sanctuary being created by the Government of Malaysia on the island of Borneo;
- Testing several techniques for preventing elephant crop raiding and reducing elephant-human conflict in the Way Kambas National Park, which contains one of the top four priority elephant populations in Indonesia;
- Identifying and evaluating ivory trade activities in China, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan, and connections to the illegal hunting of Asian elephants;
- Developing “elephant friendly” land use planning strategies around Sri Lanka’s Yala National Park where a robust population of elephants will be subject to range reduction as surrounding areas are developed for human habitation and agriculture;
- Building the capacity of local communities along India’s Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve to preserve intact elephant food corridors that are heavily impacted by human resource consumption. The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve complex contains approximately 16 percent of the world’s wild Asian elephant population.
- Development and implementation of a self-sustaining national elephant conservation strategy for Burma, which contains approximately 12 percent of the world’s total population of Asian elephants;
- Field testing a pheromone-enhanced mechanical device developed to deter elephants from entering crop areas, which would reduce human-elephant conflict; and
- Establishing programs for elephant monitoring, human-elephant conflict reduction and anti-poaching for Thailand’s Khao Yai National Park—one of the few protected areas in Thailand that can support a viable population of wild Asian elephants.



Asian elephant-human conflict

WWF/Christy Williams

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund from First Appropriation in 1999 through FY 2003	
Total Number of Grants Proposals Received	197
Total Number of Grants Awarded	85
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	92%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$4,136,500
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$3,918,165
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$218,335
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$4,982,625